In the Claims

Claims 1 – 3 (Cancelled)

4. (New) A method for controlling a bright annealing furnace comprising a step that a partial pressure of steam within an internal environment of the furnace generating a boron oxide is reduced to a value less than about 1×10^{-5}.

5. (New) The method according to claim 4, wherein the step of reducing the partial pressure of steam to a value less than about 1×10^{-5} is conducted by lowering a dew point of the internal environment within the furnace by insertion of a gas having a hydrocarbon component to the internal furnace environment.

6 (New) The method according to claim 4, wherein the step of reducing the partial pressure of steam to a value less than about 1×10^{-5} is conducted by lowering a dew point of the internal environment within the furnace by addition of a chemical compound having a carbon component to the internal furnace environment.

7. (New) A method of suppressing generation of born oxide in a bright annealing furnace comprising maintaining partial pressure of steam within the furnace to less than about 1×10^{-5}.

8. (New) The method according to claim 7, wherein the partial pressure of the steam is reduced by lowering a dew point within the furnace by introducing a gas having a hydrogen component into the furnace.

9. (New) The method according to claim 7, wherein the partial pressure of the steam is reduced by lowering a dew point within the furnace by introducing a gas having a carbon component into the furnace.

10. (New) A method of controlling generation of white powder in a bright annealing furnace comprising maintaining partial pressure of steam within the furnace to less than about 1×10^{-5}

to suppress formation of boron oxide compounds from boron contained within steel strips in the furnace.

11. (New) The method according to claim 10, wherein the partial pressure of the steam is reduced by lowering a dew point within the furnace by introducing a gas having a hydrogen component into the furnace.

12. (New) The method according to claim 10, wherein the partial pressure of the steam is reduced by lowering a dew point within the furnace by introducing a gas having a carbon component into the furnace.